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THE The Co-operative Society.

THE distribution of these Tracts is meant as a friendly greeting to the reader, by the Society which has issued them. Their object is to give you a brief review of the Society's history,—to indicate its future aims and purposes,—and to induce you to become a member of the same, and to give all the help you can to carry on the good work.

Society, as you know, is divided into several distinct classes, which seem to be opposed to, and to be in antagonism with, each other. We have the ignorant and the educated,—the producer and the non-producer,—the rich and the poor; and such is the relationship of one to the other, that from necessity, class is set against class, strife and conflict and fierce competition are for ever being engendered, and the balance of advantage is constantly going to the

side of the strong—the educated—the rich—the non-producing ; while the weak—the ignorant—the productive poor are being continually driven to the wall. And the inevitable tendency of such a system is to still farther widen the chasm, and deepen the gulf ; making the rich, richer still,—and the poor, still poorer. As Co-operators, we are trying to alter this state of things.

As a rule, the men who produce the least, are in possession of the most wealth,—and those who produce that wealth, are generally poor. The possessor of wealth lives in luxurious ease and splendour, and is lauded with praise and fulsome worship, in proportion to his material possessions ; whilst the real producer of that wealth is deprived of that which he has produced, and is compelled under such a system, to drag out his life in poverty, hard toil, and comparative oblivion.

In our efforts to change the present relationships of society, we must of necessity wage a conflict with existing interests ; but our warfare is not to be carried on with fire and sword, or with habiliments stained with blood,—the barricades, and the wholesale destruction and pillage of property form no part of our scheme ; we counsel no violence, we aim at equitable and just dealing with all,—our mission is one of reconciliation and fraternity. We consider that the present conflicting and anomalous condition of society is the growth and the accumulation of ages, and is not to be removed in a day ; and instead of spoilation and wholesale destruction,—instead of undermining the foundations of the social fabric, and bringing down the whole superstructure with a shout and a crash, in order that we may build upon its ruins a new and

better state,—we purpose rather to take society as it is, with all its conflicting interests, and reconcile them; re-model society by utilising the existing materials, and by simply altering their relationship, build up gradually a superstructure more harmonious, and consequently more enduring.

We begin then with the Co-operative Store, an organization and an arrangement by which we may supply ourselves with the necessities of life, as cheaply, and more pure, and secure to ourselves periodically the profits that usually pass into the pockets of the middle men or traders. With the ever accumulating savings, and the profits arising from these transactions, and the increasing knowledge and experience gained in this department in the interval, we shall be prepared to enter further into commerce and general manufacture; and put an end to the strife and conflict that has too long been raging between labor and capital—servant and master—employer and employed; solving the problem, by making the interests hitherto so conflicting, now really identical; by converting the employeè into an employer, and the employer into a workman; each and all becoming productive; each and all more equally enjoying the results of their joint enterprise.

Out of this, there must necessarily grow an altered state of things. The large portion of the results of our industry, that has hitherto passed into other hands, being now arrested and kept in our own, must necessarily impede the future progress of those, who till now, have been so far above us; whilst we may be moved onward with greater rapidity. The gulf will soon be narrowed, and filled; and the time of meeting upon the even ground of a common equality, will

soon have come : and as the door will be continually open to all who may think fit to enter, there need be no social outcasts.

Increasing wealth will bring to us increasing comforts, and increasing influence and power ; that power and influence will soon make itself felt in the national legislature ; all traces of sectional and class legislation must and will be swept from our statute book. The land of the country must either be made a marketable commodity, or become the property of the nation ; in the one case we may become possessed of it by honorable purchase, or on the other hand we may hold it in trust from the state. The great injustice now perpetrated of appropriating large tracts of the national property to deer parks and game preserves will be put away, and additional fields of labor will be opened up to the population by the cultivation of such land, and the production of food by which the people may be fed.

But the objection to this may be that it is too visionary, and that we can little hope to see these things accomplished in our day : our answer is that it is thoroughly practical, and its full accomplishment is only a question of time. We can do much,—yea, much is already done. Our business is to begin rightly, and earnestly carry on what we may reasonably hope our children may know how to complete.

Did I say that much is already done? Yes,—there is already more than twelve hundred kindred societies in existence, who are in possession of hundreds of thousands of pounds, doing business by millions per annum, and securing to themselves the profits arising from that trade. A great proportion

of these societies are federated together, for wholesale buying ; thus securing, in addition to their other trade, the profits of the merchant. There are societies which supply their members with all the necessities, and many of the luxuries of life, inclusive of the houses they live in. There are societies owning and carrying on factories, mills, and forges, and very extensive colliery operations, all of which are turning money as profits into the pockets of their members by thousands of pounds every year. And there is no necessity to take you away from home in order to tell you what is being done. We can tell you what *we* have done, and what we are still doing, under your very eyes, in the midst of, and by a people, whose principal schools have been the dingy work-shop—the whirling, deafening forge—and the dark unhealthy mines, where they have been disciplined by hard and long continued toil for life's hard stern realities. This Society is in reality a *bona-fide* working man's institution ; it originated with, is entirely composed of, and is managed and always has been, by working men. Its original promoters were, for the most part, "Poor Nailers," of whom it may truly be said that they worked hard ; but whose stock of cash and scholastic lore was but very limited. Let what follows be taken, not as a means of boasting—but as grounds of encouragement, and incentives to action, to all who may feel themselves in similar circumstances.

The first night proceedings were taken to form the Society ; the village was canvassed from house to house, and the names of fifteen persons were registered, who were willing to become members. Now we number seven hundred and fifty. We thought ourselves sufficiently rich to commence business when we had

accumulated the sum of Fifteen Pounds,—now we have a capital of Four Thousand Five Hundred Pounds. Our first place of business was situated in a back street, at the house of one of our members, who nobly and generously gave us the use of his kitchen for the purpose; now we have four large well-stocked shops in the principal thoroughfares of Lye and Halesowen, from which our members may be supplied with Provisions, Furniture, Drapery, and Shoes. The first week's receipts, for goods sold, was four or five pounds; now we are taking between Three and Four Hundred a week. Our profits for the first quarter were Five Pounds Five Shillings, whilst the profits at the present time are at the rate of Twelve Hundred a year. These profits, be it observed, are periodically divided among the members, in proportion to the amount they have individually spent at the Stores, during that period. In addition to this, we have a Clothing Club, open to members and non-members alike. Provision is also made for death, by the formation of a Funeral Fund, from which each member standing good upon the books, and doing a reasonable amount of business with the society, is entitled to Five Pounds, in the case of the death of himself, or his wife.

Considering the advantages above indicated, it is now time you should be informed of the conditions of membership. Every person, male or female, who may be disposed to improve their condition by associated effort, may become a member: by membership you become a shareholder to any amount you like, between three and a hundred. Each share is One Pound in value. These shares you may pay at once, or in instalments, at the rate of Threepence per week, or

any larger sum, until the shares you intend to hold are completed. Supposing you are too poor to pay even this small sum, and you can manage to pay a Shilling as a first deposit upon your shares, and then you commence to do business with the Society, the profits periodically falling due to you, instead of being withdrawn, may be transferred to your share account, until your shares are completed, or as long as you choose. Nobody can say they are too poor: the Society is adapted to meet the wants of all; and scores and hundreds have had cause to bless the day that this Society was originated. In some cases it has fed the hungry, and clothed the naked; it has liberated others from the bondage of debt; it has given help to the comparatively helpless; it has been a standing reproof to prodigality and improvidence; it has given hope to the down-cast; it has stood beside the weeping widow and fatherless children; it constantly teaches the lesson of human brotherhood; and calls upon all within its influence to take the advice of John Ploughman. For though you may have had adverse circumstances to contend with, it may be that adversity may prove a good school master. Look up, brother, and prove yourself a man! Tuck up your shirt sleeves, and make free use of joint oil and sticking plaister, and all will come right yet. And if you have got the cart into the rut, if you will put your shoulder to the wheel, and keep it there, it may be got out again; and your eggs may be brought to a good market, after all.

In conclusion, then we would urge upon your consideration the claims of the Society. As a means of self-help, we call upon you to become a member. As an instrument or lever, in raising and elevating

others, we call upon you to contribute your quota of power and influence to help on the good work ; and speed the happy day, when social grades and class distinctions shall be covered by family relationships ; when we shall all be made happy, contented, and free.

Why are we ever waiting, waiting
For a better day !
Hoping that something may be done,
Till one by one life's thread is spun,
And then away, away !

The sun is high up, shining, shining,
Our journey not half done ;
Those bits of gold along the sand
Are nothing to the promised land,
Stay not—come on, come on.

Your dividends are golden, golden,
But what are they to me ;
I know there's better things to gain,
Far nobler objects to obtain,
Much more that yet shall be.

Climb on a little higher, higher,
And reach yon mountain's brow,
There's something there lies just
behind
A glorious valley we shall find,
Where purest waters flow.

Say not your feet are weary, weary,
Think not of rest to-day,
But think how much of misery
Thousands still bear, who cannot see
There is a better way.

Stretch forth your hands to aid them,
aid them,
How little is the cost !
In helping others we are blest—
Of all earth's labours 'tis the best
And never, never lost.

The sweets of life are flowing, flowing
Honey and milk are here ;
Co-operation, ever blest,
Shall rear at length your homes of
rest,
Beyond all want of fear.

Come every one, the poorest, poorest,
Here none shall be afraid ;
Rest 'neath the fig tree and the vine,
Where olive wreaths and roses twine,
God's world for all was made.

Listen ! bright streams are gushing,
gushing,
When will they meet our sight !
Oh ! for what years we've longed to
see,
To taste the sparkling purity,
And share their heavenly light.

No, do not say—not yet, not yet ;
We'll gird our strength anew,
We cannot, must not, will not rest ;
Together we will do our best,
And heaven the rest will do.

ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIETY,

J. PEARSON.

Lye, April 26th, 1873.